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*SNOW CLAD FIELDS IN MORNING*  
*By Gardner Symons*



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## Gardner Symons, Painter and Philosopher

By THOMAS SHREWSBURY PARKHURST

**W**HAT makes a man worth while? How may an article, concerning an artist whom the world delights to honor, be written to appeal to the natural curiosity of the reader and picture collector?

There are a few men who, as painters of land and sea, stand out as rocks in mid-ocean; who possess a quality of directness and simplicity which arouses our admiration; who illustrate the inspiring freshness and vibrancy of sunlight; who have a technique free and broad, an impeccable color sense, a surety of vision and a touch which reveals the master.

Such a man is Gardner Symons, endowed mentally by nature with a keen faculty for translating the obvious into the mystic, for transforming the unrelated facts of earth and atmosphere into artistic presentment. It is these essentials and his profound sincerity that enable him to be so broad and versatile.

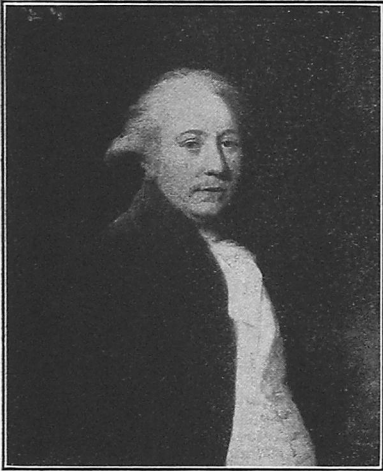
Whether it be a huge factory building devoted to machinery and toil, the bleak, snow-clad hills at whose fringe sweeps the ice-laden river, the swirl of old ice, an impotence against its rocky barrier, the interior of a mission with its medieval flavor which time may not subdue,—whatever his art essays,—he is equally convincing and satisfying.

In writing of one of America's most noted artists one may, with propriety, ignore the proverbial classification of the many prizes he has been awarded, the many museums in which he is represented and the numerous organizations which have honored him with membership, for, in order to approximate his worth, it is essential to have a flexibility of mind and mood.

The fact that he has developed into a leader in his profession is of vital significance; that he possesses a racial and æsthetic tempera-

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ment, that he does not confine himself to any particular limitation of subject is of moment. He realizes that Art demands bigness, that great men must have great dreams, that the glory of medals must not disturb nor swerve him, that his vision must be progress and each picture he paints a law unto itself, that he must be personal, progressive, complete, and strive with the spirit and splendor of a ripening vision and experience. And so, in attesting to the niche which the artist is so acceptably filling, the critic reveals the greatest understanding of his worth.

America would seem to be the land for which Gardner Symons, as an artist, is predestined, the country which one desires he may not leave for other scenes. He often paints abroad, but returns and retraces his steps to his old haunts in the East and the West. Europe offers him a contrast, but nothing more, and it is in the fastness of his California studio on the long and diversified reaches of the Laguna Coast, or in the picturesque retreat among the New England hills that he succeeds in producing the most pleasing and satisfying results of his art. It is in his own country that he portrays to its uttermost depths the essential emotions of nature. Here does he sound the note which gives to his canvas unity, stability and lasting force. Here he reveals his greatest power as a craftsman in paint, here he displays the possession of a profound and meditative interpretation.

With these sound racial qualifications he has also the courage to choose the technical methods which are his own, agreeable to him personally and so expressive of our rugged continent. He paints in a way that is peculiar to himself and uses his material in a manner that seems to fit best with the atmosphere and character of his work, and having consciously or unconsciously adopted this manner because he finds it expressive, he shows no disposition to dally with other methods of interpretation.

It is sufficient for him to do what he wants to do in the way he thinks best. Whether his method will please other artists, or will suit the public is a point which does not concern him. He works as his experience and taste

dictate, and this denotes his freedom from that boredom, convention.

Judging from results, he has justified his position, for his pictures are extraordinarily convincing in their outlook and their quality, possessing a clear significance which makes for interest and proclaims the sincerity of modern development. Their greatest significance comes from the originality of viewpoint, and it is glorious to observe the certainty with which the artist attacks and overcomes the problems of practice. His outlook is that of a realist who sees things as they are, and does not seek to soften, by any false or sentimental idealization, the facts that are worth artistic representation. Nevertheless his realism is so guided by æsthetic and infallible understanding that his pictures are never coarse, and assuredly far from commonplace. His draughtsmanship is keenly sensitive and robust, fluent and accurate, with a latent sketchy, harmonious arrangement of line, delightful in feeling, and with a subtle elegance of contour, and it may be said, with a finality of conviction, that he never relaxes his grasp of the great principles of art. Nothing is allowed to count as unimportant; the fact that he has chosen a subject is sufficient to justify his treating it with all sincerity and concentration.

A Symons landscape or marine is a Symons, a thing personal, quite distinctive, and, in nearly every case, distinguished. It may be finished in a "once over," as in the case of many canvases that it has been my good fortune to see, in which circumstance, knowing the methods which produced it, the result causes the observer to exclaim "miraculous." There is no fumbling brush work, the preliminary experiment has been in the subconscious domain, not on the canvas and in the great out-doors which he calls his studio. Here he places unerringly on his canvas the subject; here from Nature comes his color harmony, his sense of romance in the presentment, his dexterous handling of tonal values, and his masterly sense of composition.

Being an artist in love with Nature, careless of the vogue of schools, also scholastic tradition, he approaches Art with joy. Of this

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*WINTER'S LAST HIDING  
NOOKS  
By Gardner Symons*

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there is no mistake. If there be labor of the mind or brush it is never visible, as his sense of spontaneity is always present, and so he

invariably gives us an enthusiastic expression of his own vision.

A man is known by his friends, and to those who know Symons well he is not only a magnificent artist, but a keen philosopher and moralist. At the Club gatherings he is generally surrounded by an appreciative number of fellow artists who listen to his wisdom. It was happily my good fortune to be present at one of these meetings and of the evening there lingers in my memory the vision of a medium, well-poised man of middle age, whose every movement expressed decisive energy, but which seemed secondary qualities when you beheld his kindly face, and caught the melodious measure of his voice. I may not quite recall the wisdom of his utterance, but in speaking of his sympathetic nature I am sure of my ground. To see him and note these dominant traits was to add interest to my acquaintance with his art.

Afterwards, sitting in his winter studio, which lies in the shadows of that paradise, Gramercy Park, that quaint environment so dear to the artist colony of the metropolis, our talk led us to the consideration of the most vital expression of art.

"To stand for a straight conveyance of fact, is not the utmost limit of Art," said the master. "There is an ideal far beyond any fact,



JOYS OF WINTER  
By Gardner Symons

there is imaginative truth beyond ideals. No great artist ever commenced at the top. Method must be learned before the picture is expressed, and the idea expressed comes before the expression. All painting is symbolistic, or should be,—the greatest art is the simplest art, and to paint big, one must take his canvas out-of-doors.

"Do you realize how difficult it is to retain in a finished canvas the virility and freshness of a first sketch made in *plein air*, and who has not, in retouching it to pass a jury, seen it ebb its life away, and lose all the vital and dramatic qualities it should retain.

"The greatest art does not come from the studio, neither does the greatest virtue emanate from the convent—they both find their greatest stimulant in Nature. The lonely dweller of the mountains and plains is not a moral giant; he requires the temptations of a higher civilization to become morally strong. There is no dignity without labor. Pictures should domesticate, not bewilder. Art is the desire to create, and the hand can never create anything greater than the idea that inspired it."

And so you must not think of Gardner Symons in conventional terms or you will fail to grasp the significance of his personality, or the spirit of his paintings.

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wind, strong grip whether of extended hand or swiftly moving brush. You might call him

a realist, for he is one; vigorous, direct, clear-cut; or an impressionist, for light and air are put into his canvases to stay. But there is something more besides the robustness, besides the fine color and glittering light; it is a sort of inside principle, informing his work and creating its special character, a broadness, a joyousness, a hopefulness, a certain wide-eyed, jubilant outlook. You find yourself compelled to note the temperament and the secure and blithe handling together, and you have no choice but to call him an optimist in Art.

"The whole tenor of the art of Mr. Symons reads vigor, radiance, power, cheerfulness, hopefulness; not the greyest of these canvases ever said, 'What's the use?' And the man who paints them turns—brushes, smock, paint-daubs and all—to smile his explanation, which somehow has nothing to do with cubists or futurists or post-impressionists: 'Beneath the clouds,' he quotes, 'is the sun still shining.'

"Notable works by Mr. Symons are to be found in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Corcoran Gallery, Washington; the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences; the Cincinnati Museum; the Toledo Museum; the Art Institute, Chicago; and abroad (England) in the collections of Lord Ronald Gower and the Marquis of Lorne.

"Honors received are the Carnegie Prize of



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the National Academy of Design, 'The Opalescent River,' (Metropolitan Museum), 1909; the Evans Prize, Salmagundi Club, 1910; medal, Buenos Aires Exposition, 1910; 'Last Lights,' prize and gold medal, National Arts Club, 1912; 'The Sun's Last Glow and the Moon'; Clarke Prize and medal, Corcoran Gallery, 1912; 'Breaking of the River Ice'; Saltus gold medal, National Academy of Design, 1913, 'Youth.' "

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